Two Yemenite Djinn

By R. B. Serjeant

(1) *The 'Udhrūṭ* (اَلْعُضْرُوط).

THE word *'udhrūṭ* (pl. *'adhārīṭ*) appears in most of the lexicons which I have consulted, but it does not seem to be known in the sense of a supernatural creature, although this meaning is familiar to Yemenite folklore and dialect.

According to my informant, the *'udhrūṭ* is one of the various types of *Djinn*. Sometimes it is a servant (*khādim*[1]) of the *Djinn*. It is not exactly a *Djinnī*, but it is counted one of the kinds of *Djinn*, because the *'adhārīṭ* act in the same way (*li'annahum sā'irīn fī shakl wāḥid fi 'l-af'āl*), and because they can alter their shapes (*tashakkulāt*) just as the *Djinn* do. The *'udhrūṭ* looks like a wolf, but it can transform itself into the shape of a dog, cat, or any animal, it may turn into a stone, or it may even take the shape of a man or woman.

Others, says my informant, maintain that they are men who have been transformed (*ragul mamsūkh*) into *'adhārīṭ*. The *'udhrūṭ* was of human kind, but later he was transformed from the shape of human kind into that of the *Djinn* (*kān min Banī Ādam, wa-ba'd musikh min ṣūrat Banī Ādam ilā ṣūrat al-Ginn*).

When a man is killed, the Satan draws near (*yiqārib ash-Shaiṭān*), said my informant. It seems that the *'adhārīṭ*, too, approach any locality where a murder has taken place. If you pass at night by a place where a murder has been committed, you see this creature which "bowfs" at you, and then vanishes. *'Adhārīṭ* are attracted to the blood of dead men. They live in any house where people have been killed (*maskinuh fī makān aiyi qatli insān — ragul aw imrāh*). Nor is there any way of exorcising them, for blood is there. They only come to frighten you, but they are believed to do no actual harm.

All this is, of course, according to my informant, legendary (*akhbār qīl*), imaginings (*mutawahhamāt*), or idle tales (*summāyah*, pl. *samāmī*). When asked why these men were transformed into *'adhārīṭ*, he quoted what he averred was a Koranic phrase,[2] "We have transformed them into monkeys and swine" (*masakhnā-hum qiradan wa-khanāzīra*).

When the spirit (*rūḥ*) of a dead man rises from him, it returns and hovers round the place where he died.[3] A good man's soul frequents the place whence

[1] The form used is generally confined in colloquial to the pariah-caste of sweepers, etc. A personal servant would be *khaddām*.

[2] This does not seem to be actually Koranic, but passages to much the same effect may be consulted in Kor., ii, 61; v, 65; vii, 166; xxxvi, 57, where God has transformed certain people, or threatens to do so, on account of some evil deed.

[3] *Ar-rūḥ titraddad ila 'l-makān alladhī ṭala'at minnuh.* It may be remarked that in the Yemen one gives coffee to the poor for the soul of one's relatives, e.g. *lā-rūḥ Abī*, for the soul of my father.

This content downloaded from 129.78.139.29 on Sun, 11 Sep 2016 12:25:11 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

it came. The *'udhrūṭ*, however, is said to be the spirit of an evil man who has been killed (*rūḥ al-shakhṣ al-maqtūl*). The return of the spirit whence it arose is believed by my informant to be a sound belief (*'aqīda ṣaḥīḥa*), though he was sceptical of the existence of *'adhārīṭ*, which, he pointed out, nobody has ever actually seen. It will be perceived that this creature has some points of resemblance to the *ṣadā* of classical literature.

In a collection of South Arabian proverbs [1] the following saw is quoted, *Ginnī 'ishiq 'udhrūṭ*, i.e. "A *Djinnī* has fallen in love with an *'udhrūṭ*". It is said to mean that when at last one obtains what one has long desired but not attained, one becomes so attached to it that one cannot part from it. A similar proverb is *Ginnī liqī wada'ah*, i.e. "A *Djinnī* has got a bead".[2] A *wada'ah* is not a valuable bead, but the *Djinnī* is so pleased with it that he cannot let it out of his sight. My questioning unfortunately was not able to elicit any reason why a *Djinnī* should fall in love with an *'udhrūṭ*.

(2) *The Dubb* (اَلدُّبّ).

The *dubb* is like the *'udhrūṭ*, and they are said to be of the same sort (*ṣanf wāḥid*). It is like a monkey (*rabaḥ*). If it meets you, it speaks to you like a man. It does everything that you do, sits, stands, eats, throws stones, and imitates all your actions. If you fire at it, your bullet will miss it, but it will fire back at you, doubtless with evil consequences. You should therefore never speak to the *dubb*. There is indeed a proverb, "Do not teach the *dubb* to pick up stones" (*lā ta'allim ad-dubb laqṭ al-ḥagar*). That is, lest he throw them back at you—in other words, do nothing which may lead to your own undoing, let sleeping dogs lie.

Another proverb quoted to me by Raḥīma bint Dja'far is, *An-nās fī ghaflāthim wa-d-dubb yurquṣ fi 'l-gabal*, i.e. "The people heed not, while the *dubb* is dancing in the mountain". This might be rendered in the words of Gray :—

> Alas ! regardless of their doom
> The little victims play !
> No sense they have of ills to come,
> Nor care beyond to-day :

You say to a foolish person, scolding him for his silliness, *Ant ka'annak dubb*, i.e. "You're like a *dubb*".

This creature, too, seems peculiar to Yemenite belief, and this sense of the word is not known to the lexicons. As a protection against both *'udhrūṭ* and *dubb*, you utter the phrase, *A'ūdh billāh min al-Shaiṭān al-radjīm*, as you do in the case of other *Djinn*. On the first occasion that I questioned my Yemenite

[1] 'Abdullāh Ya'ḳūb Khān, *Ḳāmūs al-Amthāl al-'Adanīya* (Cairo, 1933), p. 28.
[2] Cf. ibid., No. 101. *A'mā laqī wada'ah*, i.e. a blind man has found a bead.

This content downloaded from 129.78.139.29 on Sun, 11 Sep 2016 12:25:11 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

informant, however, he said that one should not mention the names of God or the Prophet in the presence of the *dubb*.[1]

[Transliteration: For colloquial Arabic, a transliteration more closely approximating to Yemeni dialect than that of the *Encyl. of Islam* has been used; for classical Arabic, the *EI.* transliteration is adopted. *N.B.*—*dh* represents ض, *g* ج, and *q* ق.]

[1] For comparison the following might be consulted: G. van Vloten, "Dämonen, Geister und Zauber bei den alten Arabern", *WZKM.* (Vienna, 1893–94), vii and viii (based on Djāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*); Muḥ. b. Aḥmad al-Ibshīhī, *Al-Mustaṭraf* (Cairo, 1933), ii, 77 seq.; G. Rat, *Al-Mostaṭraf* [trans.] (Paris, 1899–1902), ii, 158–170; P. A. Eichler, *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran* (Leipzig, 1928) [with a good bibliography]; A. S. Tritton, "Spirits and Demons in Arabia", *JRAS.*, 1934, p. 715; and *EI.*, article "Djinn", etc.

This content downloaded from 129.78.139.29 on Sun, 11 Sep 2016 12:25:11 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms